

Junk vehicles in Ravalli County

The Environmental Health Department regularly receives complaints about junk vehicles, usually from neighbors who consider such inoperable vehicles eyesores. Montana, in fact, has a junk vehicle law which requires that such vehicles either be removed or shielded from public view.

Upon contacting the property owners on whose land the vehicles reside, we often find that people are more than willing to get rid of the vehicles, but are worried about the cost of hauling them away.

Ravalli County, like all counties in Montana, has a fund that covers the removal and disposal of junk vehicles. The money for the fund comes from vehicle licensing fees and is administered by the Environmental Health Department. It allows junk vehicles to be hauled away at no cost to the owner.

What is a “junk vehicle” and what is “public view”?

A junk vehicle is defined as any “discarded, ruined, wrecked or dismantled motor vehicle, including component parts, which is not lawfully and validly licensed, and remains inoperative or incapable of being driven.” A vehicle must meet all three parts of the definition to be classified as a junk vehicle.

Public view is defined as “any point six feet above the surface of the center of a public road from which a junk vehicle can be seen.” A public road is any publicly owned or maintained highway, street, road or alley.

What can be done to comply with Montana’s Junk Vehicle Law?

In short, a vehicle must either be shielded, made operable, licensed or removed.

Shielding the vehicle – Merely covering a junk vehicle with a tarp is not adequate shielding. A vehicle may either be moved to a location out of public view, like a garage or behind a solid fence, hill or building, or a permanent fence may be constructed to shield junk vehicles.

Repairing or licensing the vehicle – A junk vehicle may also be repaired so it can be started and driven, or it can be licensed. Either action will remove the vehicle from the classification of a junk vehicle.

Removing the vehicle – A junk vehicle may be hauled away at no cost to the owner by filling out and returning a Motor Vehicle Release Form to the Ravalli County Environmental Health Department. The form is available at the RCEH office or online at www.ravallcounty.mt.gov/environmental/documents/junkvehicle.pdf.

The release form requires that all fluids be removed from the vehicle before it is hauled. After the form is turned in, a licensed wrecker will remove the junk vehicle and haul it to the county’s junk vehicle yard where it will later be crushed and recycled.

Montana was one of the leading states in enacting junk vehicle legislation. Its primary purpose is to control junk vehicles from being scattered throughout the countryside and neighborhoods, thereby helping to preserve the state’s natural beauty. This program also provides for the recycling of junk vehicles so their materials can be utilized again. The benefits of this program are available to all Montanans, so please feel free to use it.

In order to help citizens understand more clearly many of the environmental health issues in Ravalli County and the role of the Environmental Health Department in addressing these issues, our department will run a series of weekly newspaper articles titled "Environmental Health Talk."

In this ongoing series we hope to help raise the community's awareness of issues such as air and water quality and give readers useful tips on topics like recycling, collecting and disposing of hazardous materials and maintaining septic systems, just to name a few. To this end, we welcome public comment. If there's an environmental health issue you'd like us to address, write call or email the department: RCEH, c/o "EnviroHealth Talk," 215 South 4th St, Suite D, Hamilton MT 59840. Phone: 375-6571. Email: rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov